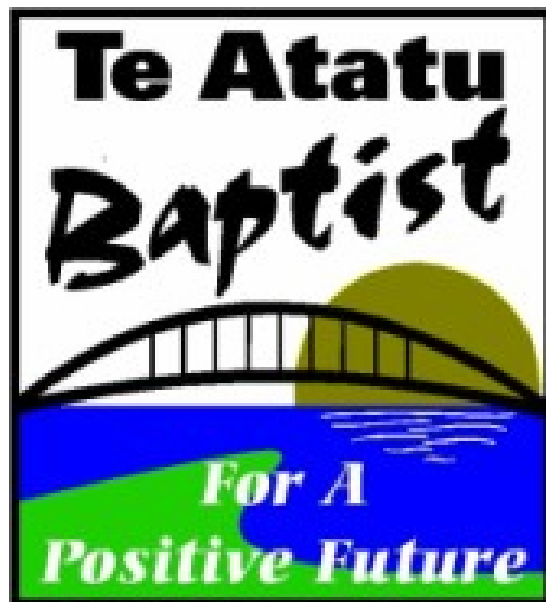


LISTENING TO GOD

“What Does God’s Voice
Sound Like?”



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Sermon adapted from a study I downloaded from somewhere on the internet – but I have no idea where :-)

Can we all turn in our Bibles to Psalm 46:10

"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

I've got a simple little exercise I want us all to do this morning: Just be as *still* and *silent* as you possibly can for the next 30 seconds or so.

Listen as intently as you can, noticing all the different sounds you hear.

How many sounds?

What are they?

Close your eyes and begin to listen.

Did you hear 1 sound-- 2? 3? 4? 5?

Did you hear the ticking of the clock?

Birds?

Traffic?

Voices?

Your own breath?

Your heartbeat?

ringing in your ears?

We are seldom *still* enough to hear the subtle sounds of life and faith..

Most of us suffer from a steady dose of noise pollution: TV, radio, conversation.

Constant sound bombards us until the naturalness of silence sounds foreign, unnatural, threatening,

...and we'll do just about anything to cover it up.

In a significant way, we are in fact *addicted* to noise.

The constant blaring of the TV is for many an electronic companion whose presence we take for granted.

We jump in the car and switch on the radio to fill the uncomfortable void; even a lapse in social conversation is viewed with alarm, and someone has to rescue the moment by talking.

Even in church, if a few moments of silence are called for in worship, many church members have this internal response: "When will this be over?"

I wonder – as we sat in silence, did anyone hear the voice of God?

And as we begin our Bible Workshop this morning, we testify afresh that the Bible is the written word of God that *perfectly* and *completely* reveals our salvation in Jesus, *and* our sanctification in the Holy Spirit of God.

We also remind ourselves that no matter what we hear in our heads or our hearts – if it doesn't *agree* with the Bible – then it isn't God we're hearing!

I. WHAT DOES GOD'S VOICE SOUND LIKE?

Out of the several ways God uses to communicate His messages to us today, we will be focusing on His speaking to us by the Holy Spirit.

God DOES speak to us today and we CAN hear His voice.

It's not a *sound*, it's a voice.

It's not something you hear with your ears but in your mind and in your spirit.

Once you learn to recognize and respond to this voice you'll *recognize* it often.

We need to be able to pick God's voice out of all the *other* voices shouting for our attention.

Hopefully this message will help you to be able to do that.

First we'll look at what God's voice sounds like,
and then we'll talk about some of the things He
says.

The first clue we have to what God's voice sounds like is in I Kings 19 where we see it is a still, small voice – a gentle whisper.

Kings 19:11-13 The LORD said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

In the still, small voice of God we are given a message that bears the stamp of His personality quite clearly and in a way we will learn to recognize.

This reminds me of the world's largest PA speaker system – at the Ontario Motor Speedway in California.

It has a total output of 30,800 watts connected to 355 speakers and able to communicate to 230,000 people above the noise of the car races.

God *could* outdo that, but instead chooses to speak *quietly*.

Therefore if we want to hear Him - we can't wait for Him to shout over the noise in our life, but we need to learn to be quiet and listen for His still, quiet voice.

Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones writes: “God sometimes answers directly in our spirit. The prophet said, ‘I will watch and see what He will say in me.’ God speaks to me by speaking in me. He can so lie something upon the mind that we are certain of the answer. He can impress something upon our spirits in an unmistakable manner. We find ourselves unable to get away from an impression that is on our mind or heart; we try to rid ourselves of it, but back it comes.”

Remember, this is not *verbal* voice, a *sensation* or an *emotional* experience.

In fact, it can be very easy to overlook His voice or just think it's a thought of our own.

We need to learn to hear God's still voice as He speaks to us.

Writer Charles Swindoll once found himself with too many commitments in too few days.

He got nervous and tense about it. "I was snapping at my wife and our children, choking down my food at mealtimes, and feeling irritated at those unexpected interruptions through the day," he recalled in his book *Stress Fractures*.

"Before long, things around our home started reflecting the pattern of my hurry-up style. It was become unbearable. I distinctly remember after supper one evening, the words of our younger daughter, Colleen. She wanted to tell me something important that had happened to her at school that day. She began hurriedly, 'Daddy, I wanna tell you somethin' and I'll tell you really fast.' Suddenly realizing her frustration, I answered, 'Honey, you can tell me -- and you don't have to tell me really fast. Say it slowly.'

I'll never forget her answer:

‘Then *listen* slowly.’”

That's good advice for all of us.

Listen slowly; listen intently, for His voice is often a gentle whisper, a still, small voice.

When we learn to listen for it we recognize that He speaks rich and enlightened thoughts into our spirits.

God can put a *new* idea directly and immediately into our mind.

He can give us a new perspective in which to view something.

He can put new desires into our hearts.

He can stimulate certain memories and Scriptures stored within our mind just when they are most needed.

Martin Luther wrote: “If the Holy Spirit should come when these thoughts are in your mind and begin to preach to your heart, giving you rich and enlightened thoughts, then give Him the honor, let your preconceived ideas go, be quiet and listen to Him Who can talk better than you; and note what He proclaims and write it down.”

James Dobson has given some of the best practical advice I have ever heard.

Describing how he does it himself, he says, “I get down on my knees and say, ‘Lord, I need to know what you want me to do, and I am listening. Please speak to me through my friends, books, magazines I pick up and read, and through circumstances.’”

Often God’s still, small voice takes the form of thoughts that are our thoughts, though they are not from us.

Often this still, small voice speaks rich and enlightening thoughts by causing a burning within my heart.

The disciples who talked with Jesus on the road to Emmaus that first Resurrection Sunday experienced this.

Luke 24:32 says, “They asked each other, ‘were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’”

Psalm 39:1-3 talks about this as well. “My heart grew hot within me, and as I meditated, the fire burned.”

So we see that this still, small voice can cause a *burning a conviction* and a *certainty* within our hearts.

How He speaks is by a gentle, quiet whisper.

Where He speaks is to our thoughts and to our hearts.

He touches our rational mental capacity (enlightened thoughts) as well as our emotional feelings (burning hearts).

II. WHAT DOES GOD'S VOICE SAY?

Hopefully that makes hearing God's voice a little clearer, but there is one more part I want to add which can be very helpful.

What does His voice say?

What can we *expect* to hear from God?

What sort of *things* does He communicate to those who are listening?

To Ezekiel God complained that "these people have ears to hear but they never hear, eyes to see but they never see" (12:2). *Jesus repeated this complaint several times as well.*

We see throughout the Bible phrases like:

"the voice of the Lord" (14 times),
"the voice of God" (3 times),
"the Lord spoke" (24 times),
"God spoke" (6 times), and
"the word of the Lord came to..." (99 times).

There is no way of knowing how many times this was a verbal voice and how many times it was God's still, small voice speaking rich thoughts to their mind or heart (or both).

If it was verbal or not, however, the result was still the same – God spoke to them and they heard Him.

When we look at these occurrences we see they can be grouped into five areas of revelation.

God spoke in 5 main ways:

conviction,
information,
encouragement,
enablement in ministry, and
revelation of Himself.

For most of us, the first time we heard God speak to us He was convicting us of sin, showing us our need of salvation.

Jesus said, “When the Holy Spirit comes, He will *convict* the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me” (John 16:A7-11).

I Thessalonians 1:4-5 says the gospel comes to us with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction.

In the 1640s George Fox, founder of the Friends or Quaker movement, wandered the fields and lanes of the English countryside, seeking someone who could show him the way to peace with God.

He finally became convinced that “there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do; then, oh! Then I heard a voice which said, ‘here is one, even Jesus Christ, that can speak to thy condition’; and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory.”

One way in which God speaks to us is to show us the sin in our life.

He does this before salvation so we will see our need of Him.

He also does this in the lives of those who have freely received His free gift of salvation.

He shows us sin so we can confess and remove it.

Charles Stanley wrote: “As we read God’s Word, we nearly always come to what I call a ‘gulp point.’ Something we read challenges us to change something in our lives, to gulp and say, ‘Wow! That really hit me. I need to do something about that.’ Sometimes it’s a conviction about sin in our lives. Sometimes it’s a correction in the way we have been taught or the way in which we act toward others. Sometimes it’s a clear call to engage in a new discipline or area of ministry.”

The problem is that we have a tendency to only listen to what we want to hear.

A doctor can give us good advice about diet changes or needed exercise, but it’s very easy to ignore his counsel if it means changes we *don’t* want to make.

A second type of content God speaks to us is information and guidance.

Jesus said, “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own; He will speak only what He hears, and He will tell you what is yet to come” (John 16:13).

The Bible abounds with examples of this.

Paul said the Holy Spirit warned him of what was to come when he went to Jerusalem (Acts 20:22-23).

He reminded the church in Corinth that they had the “mind of Christ” (2:16).

Joseph heard of Pharaoh’s dream and God told Him the contents and their meaning.

Daniel heard Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and God gave him the interpretation.

Jacob (Genesis 46:2) and Samuel (2 Samuel 23:2) both said God spoke His guidance to them.

Simeon was moved by the Spirit to find Jesus with His parents in the temple (Luke 2:25-28).

Several times the Bible tells us that God guided Him by directing His spirit (Mark 2:8; John 13:21).

God spoke to Ananias and told him to go to blind Paul (Acts 9:11-15).

An analogy I like which explains this is the shepherd-sheep illustration.

He said that His sheep hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:4, 16, 27).

Jesus’ definition of a disciple is one who follows Him, who hears His voice and responds.

St. Augustine tells of a time God’s voice guided him. “I heard from a neighbouring house a voice, as of a boy or girl, I know not, changing, and oft repeating, ‘Take up and read. Take up and read.’ I could remember no child’s game with these words. So, checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; interpreting it to be no other than a command from God, to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find.”

Because of this, he came upon Romans 13:13-14 which led to his salvation and transformation.

So when we talk about the *content* of what God speaks we find He speaks *conviction, information and guidance*, and also *encouragement*.

God doesn't just speak information to us; quite often He speaks words of encouragement, peace, comfort and strength.

When He speaks to us through His Word the Bible, it isn't just to inform us, but to *transform* us as well!

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (John 14:27).

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7).

He also tells us how to carry on the responsibilities and ministries He has given us.

His voice calls people into ministry (I Timothy 1:12; 2:6-7) and then tells those whom He has called what to say.

Moses is an example of this (Exodus 4:10-12).

I'm sure you've noticed times when you were talking to someone about spiritual things and all of a sudden the right thoughts came to you and you were able to explain something in a way you never thought you could.

The final form His communication may take is that of revelation of Himself.

Often it will just seem to ‘hit’ us how *wonderful, powerful* or *majestic* God is.

This is Him revealing Himself to us by His Holy Spirit.

He does this so we will respond in praise and worship.

Sometimes we can be so overwhelmed with God’s love in our soul that we find ourselves enraptured in an immense feeling of being loved deeply, of God telling us how much He loves us.

Our natural response is to worship, to love Him back.

So we’ve seen this morning that God speaks to us in a gentle whisper.

When He does, He speaks rich and enlightening thoughts to our minds.

Or He may cause a warm burning in our hearts as He speaks to our emotions and feelings.

The content which He communicates to us consists of conviction, information and guidance, encouragement and peace, enablement in ministry, and a revelation of Himself to cause us to worship Him.

In which of these areas has He been speaking to you during the last week?

In which is He speaking to you now?

Where do you *need* to hear Him speaking in the coming week?

Now that you know a little better what God’s voices sounds like and the kinds of things He talks about, make sure you are listening for them this week.

Many people like to write down these things so they remember and follow through with them.

Make sure you are always listening, for God will be speaking.

He will speak to you this week, will you hear Him?

Let's pray.